



In the last 24 hours, national and regional media outlets have reported on an image depicting three young men holding guns in front of a bullet-riddled sign that commemorates the place in the Mississippi Delta where Emmett Till's body was found. In 1955, Emmett Till was abducted, tortured, and brutally killed at the age of 14 after being accused of offending a white woman in a grocery store. His death was a major catalyst of the civil rights movement. Based on what the photo implies and the pleasure these men seem to take in the denigration of this commemorative sign, this image is offensive and hurtful.

The university learned of this image in March through a report to its Bias Incident Response Team and referred the matter to the University Police Department. At that time, the university did not know the identities of all three men, or that they were all affiliated with the same fraternity. UPD reported the image to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which reported back to UPD that it declined to investigate further because the photo did not pose a specific threat.

The incident occurred off campus, did not rise to the level of a threat per federal authorities, and was not part of any university-affiliated event. As a community of learning and a state institution, we have limits on the tools available to remedy this offensive behavior. Leadership of the Kappa Alpha Order, the fraternity with which these men are affiliated, has decided to suspend the students from the fraternity. We are aware that this decision is backed by its National Administrative Offices. We support this action and stand ready to assist the fraternity with educational opportunities for those members and the chapter.

These are not things we take lightly. In light of our history, our University of Mississippi community of more than 25,000 people needs to come together to make it clear that these students and their actions do not represent the values

of our institution. They do not speak for our institution, and they do not define us. What makes this different than other offensive, hurtful, and disgusting things we see on social media each day is that, at the very least, it belittles the price that a 14-year-old paid for being black. Race and ethnicity are not choices; they are not political affiliations, decisions, or attitudes. They are fundamental aspects of our dignity, and who we are as individuals. We are a community of scholars committed to creating an academic experience that teaches racial equity, and we unequivocally reject attitudes that do not respect the dignity of each individual.

Larry D. Sparks
Interim Chancellor

The University of Mississippi